MYTHS OF MODERN INDIVIDUALISM

Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe

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THE HISTORICAL MAGICIAN

Of our four myths, that of Faust is unique in one respect: It undoubtedly began with a real historical person. Unfortunately, although there are many contemporaneous records of his activities, they are defective in many ways, and we do not really know what kind of person the original Faust was.

There was a widely known wandering magician in Germany during the first four decades of the sixteenth century who went under the name of George (in German Jörg, in Latin Georgius) Faust or Faustus; sometimes he was known merely as Doctor Faust. He was born, possibly about 1480, in the small town of Knittlingen in northern Württemberg; and he probably died in about 1540, possibly at Staufen, another small Württemberg town, not far south of Freiburg.

There are some thirteen contemporaneous references to this George Faust. They can be roughly divided into five groups: letters of scholarly opponents; sundry public records; tributes from satisfied customers; other, more noncommittal memoirs; and reactions of Protestant clerical enemies.[1]

The fullest and earliest account of Faust is given in a letter by a

1 The most reliable account of contemporary sources is Hans Henning, "Faust als historische Gestalt," *Jahrbücher der Weimarer Goethe-Gesellschaft* 21 (1959), pp. 107–39. The main biographical documents are conveniently available in an English translation, with commentary and notes, in Philip Mason Palmer and Robert Pattison More, *The Sources of the Faust Tradition from Simon Magus to Lessing* (New York, 1936), cited hereafter in the text as *S*. It has recently been argued that "Faustus" was the Latin pseudonym of one Georgius Helmstetter, who was awarded the degree of Master from the University of Heidelberg in 1487 – see Frank Baron, *Doctor Faustus: From History to Legend* (Munich, 1978), pp. 12–22 – but this view has not been widely accepted.

scholarly opponent dated 1507. It was written in Latin, as most of the documents of the time were, and was addressed to Johannes Virdung, a mathematician or astrologer who was a professor at the University of Heidelberg. The writer, Johannes Tritheim, a well-known Benedictine scholar, was at that time the abbot of a monastery at Würzburg. Tritheim is fiercely contemptuous of Faust: He calls him a "vagabond, a babbler and a rogue" who has shown himself "to be a fool and not a philosopher." According to Tritheim, "As soon as he heard that I was there" at an inn in Gelnhausen, Faust "fled from the inn and could not be persuaded to come into my presence." Tritheim writes that Faust claimed to be the "younger Faust, the chief of necromancers, astrologer, the second magus, palmist, diviner" (*S*, pp. 83–86).

When he called himself a "necromancer" Faust meant a practitioner of black magic who foretold the future by communing with the spirits of the dead; an "astrologer" (then as now) meant someone who interpreted the influence of the planets and stars on human affairs. In calling himself "the younger Faust" and the "second magus," however, Faust was probably claiming to belong to a much more dangerous and heretical tradition; and this goes some way towards clarifying the reasons for the conflict between Faust and the scholarly humanists who were interested in learned magic. For the early history of magic is very relevant to a fuller understanding of the Faust myth.

In Faust's day the ignorant and the learned alike believed that they inhabited a world largely governed by invisible spiritual forces. The more adventurous among the scholars of the Renaissance hoped that a better understanding of rediscovered works of the past would teach them new ways of understanding and controlling those forces. For instance, among the Greek manuscripts Cosimo de Medici collected from Byzantium, the one that most interested him dealt with magic: the *Corpus Hermeticum* was a miscellaneous compilation of astrological and theological writings belonging to the second or third century A.D. It was translated into Italian in 1471 by Marsilio Ficino. Ficino and his successors developed the assumption that the *Corpus Hermeticum* was a key to the most ancient, and therefore the

most original and authentic, wisdom of the ancients from Zoroaster to Plato; it was the *prisca theologia*, the uncontaminated source of pristine knowledge of God and his creation. The Christian tradition in general had proscribed the use of such powers as the work of the devil. But Ficino persuaded himself that the orthodox view was mistaken; these powers were not demonic, but should properly be seen as analogous to Platonic ideas; they would, he thought, mediate between spirit and matter, between the soul of the world and its material body.[2]

Later, another Italian, Pico della Mirandola, added to this tradition of learned magic, in making a rather more heretical attempt to bridge the gap between pagan and Christian learning in the practice of magic. Tritheim was a celebrated, though somewhat controversial, successor to such men.[3] But Faust does not belong to the same tradition. We do not know exactly what he had in mind in calling himself the "younger Faust" – the name was a common one, meaning "fortunate" in Latin and "fist" in German – but one possibility is a reference to the fifth-century St. Faustus who was attacked by Augustine for his allegedly Manichean heresies.[4] The heretical analogy in the second title, "second magus," however, is much clearer: it must refer to Simon Magus, Simon the Mage, or magician. Our word "magic" is derived from the Magi, an ancient tribe of Medes who were famous as diviners;[5] they are best known to the West from the three wise men of the East in St. Matthew's Gospel, whose command of judicial astrology had enabled them to foretell the birth of Christ. Simon Magus was supposedly a magician belonging to a Gnostic sect at the time of the Apostles.[6] In Samaria he was so

2 Francis A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London, 1964), pp. 12–17.

3 Yates, *Bruno*, pp. 11–19, 140–45. See also Klaus Arnold, *Johannes Trithemius, 1462–1516* (Würzburg, 1971).

4 *Confessions of St. Augustine* (London, 1950), pp. 80–88.

5 E. M. Butler, *The Myth of the Magus* (1948; Cambridge, 1993), pp. 15–20.

6 Acts 8.9 (biblical citations throughout are from the King James Version). See Butler, *The Myth of the Magus*, pp. 73–83; *S*, pp. 12–14; Beatrice Daw Brown, "Marlowe, Faustus, and Simon Magus," *PMLA* 54 (1939), pp. 82–121.

impressed by the power of Peter and John to bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit by the mere laying on of hands, that he offered the two Apostles money if they would teach him how they did it. For this Simon was condemned by Peter, and thus gave his name to the sin of "simony," which is not merely a reprehensible selling of ecclesiastical offices, but, since it abuses a divine gift for personal profit, is considered to be the unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost.

The opposition between Simon Magus and the Apostles marks a very significant moment in the long history of the conflict between religion and magic. The view that there were different and equally legitimate ways of controlling supernatural forces had not been challenged decisively until the advent of Hebrew monotheism. But from the time of the Apostles onwards, the Christian church increasingly laid exclusive claim to the control of the invisible world; and it is this assertion of the Christian priesthood to exclusive rights to all rituals and other magical practices that is enacted in the confrontation of Simon Magus and St. Peter.

According to various apocryphal works such as *The Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul*, Simon set up his own religion, in which he was worshiped as the son of God, and attempted to rival the miracles of Jesus. His most spectacular feat was to contrive his own resurrection. A ram was bewitched to take on Simon's appearance; it was then beheaded; and three days later Simon astounded the Emperor Nero by reappearing with his top appendage intact. This put Peter's monopoly of miraculous power into jeopardy; but Peter triumphed when Simon, correctly but foolishly, tried to follow up his resurrection with his ascension. Having apprised Nero of his coming apotheosis, Simon took off from the top of a specially constructed tower on the Campus Martius in Rome. Seeing this, Nero said to Peter: "This Simon is true . . . you see him going up into heaven." With the future of Christendom hanging in the balance, Peter summoned up his invisible forces: "I adjure you, ye angels of Satan, who are carrying him into the air, to deceive the hearts of the unbelievers, by the God that created all things, and by Jesus Christ, whom on the third day He raised from the dead, no longer from this hour to keep him up, but to let him go." There-

upon, *The Acts of the Holy Apostles* continues, "being let go, he fell into a place called Sacra Via, that is, Holy Way, and was divided into four parts, having perished by an evil fate" (*S*, pp. 33–34).

In the traditions of the church Simon survived as the supreme monitory example of what awaited heretics whose magic challenged the Christian priesthood's claim to an exclusive control over the supernatural world. Simon's fate, in fact, remotely foreshadowed the conflict which was ultimately to transform the foolish German conjuror who called himself the second magus into the grandly defiant protagonist of the Faust myth.

Tritheim regarded Faust as an overt, though hardly serious, heretic. Faust, he reported, "said in the presence of many that the miracles of Christ the Saviour were not so wonderful [*non sint miranda*], that he himself could do all the things which Christ had done, as often and whenever he wished" (*S*, p. 85). Tritheim was alarmed lest this indiscreet and foolish vulgarian should give the classical studies and the learned magic of the humanists a bad name among orthodox Christians. Conrad Mutianus Rufus, an eminent humanist and an influential local ecclesiastic at Erfurt, had a similar fear: in a letter of 1513 he dismisses "a certain soothsayer by the name of George Faust," as "a mere braggart and fool"; but then Rufus adds significantly: "The ignorant marvel at him. Let the theologians rise against him and not try to destroy the philosopher Reuchlin" (*S*, pp. 87–88). Johann Reuchlin was an eminent contemporary of Erasmus, and his biblical scholarship had fallen foul of the Dominicans, who regarded Hebrew studies as in themselves blasphemous, if not heretical. But Reuchlin was also interested in mystical and magical lore, and in the *Cabala*; there was, therefore, an additional reason why he and the humanist movement in general should have felt that they already had enough difficulties without being pilloried through an identification of their learning and magic with the cheap tricks of an ignorant marketplace cheat such as Faust.

Tritheim reports that Faust claimed to have mastered the classical tradition of Greece and Rome: specifically, to have "acquired such knowledge of all wisdom and such a memory, that if all the books of Plato and Aristotle, together with their whole philosophy, had to-

tally passed from the memory of man, he himself, through his own genius, like another Hebrew Ezra, would be able to restore them all with increased beauty" (*S*, p. 85). No record exists of these professed aesthetic increments; but a later tradition reports a fine example of how Faust combined his powers as a necromancer with a smattering of classical interests. When he came to Erfurt, then one of the greatest centers of German humanism, Faust "through his boasting brought it to pass that he was allowed to lecture publicly" on Homer. The students asked him to show them the heroes of the Trojan war, and Faust did so at a later session. His Polyphemus in particular created a sensation:

> He wore a fiery red beard and was devouring a fellow, one of whose legs was dangling out of his mouth. The sight of him scared them so that their hair stood on end and when Dr. Faust motioned him to go out, he acted as though he did not understand but wanted to grasp a couple of them too with his teeth. And he hammered on the floor with his great iron spear so that the whole Collegium shook, and then he went away.[7]

Faust must have put on a first-class act of necromancy; but, quite apart from the still familiar stage pretence that the magic is so real that it has got out of control, his performance was not original. John Franciscus, Pico della Mirandola's nephew, had witnessed a similar piece of apparent necromancy in Italy; and the figure of Helen of Troy was summoned up before the Emperor Maximilian by a scholar who was possibly Tritheim himself.[8] Tritheim was a published magician, a fact which helps to account for his bitter contempt of a rival who was, in his terms, uneducated.

Faust probably had a smattering of learning; he may even have been to a university, but there is no extant evidence of his having taken any degree. It is true that the 1509 matriculation records of Heidelberg University mention that one "Johannes Faust ex Simern" was admitted a Bachelor of Theology (*S*, pp. 86–87); but our

7 The story is told in the seventeenth-century *Thuringian Chronicle* by Zacharias Hogel; it was based on another work, now lost, of the mid-sixteenth century. Quoted here from *S*. pp. 108–10.

8 Butler, *The Myth of the Magus*, pp. 126, 135.

magician was from the first known as George, and he was already making his claims to be "the chief of necromancers" in 1507, according to the Tritheim letter. It is much more likely that George Faust is now granted the appellation of Doctor only because history has posthumously ratified a courtesy title that he originally bestowed on himself for purposes of professional advertisement.[9] The same wish for scholarly prestige no doubt explains why, when he attempted to break out of the fly-blown routines of conjuring and fortune-telling to try something new, it was to the classical and biblical scholarship of Renaissance humanism that he turned.

Faust had also had his successes as a professional magician. There are three extant writings of satisfied customers which testify to this. The first concerns the Bishop of Bamberg, whose treasurer noted that he had paid ten guilders – then a very large fee – on February 12, 1520, to "Doctor Faust, the philosopher," for having drawn up the Bishop's "horoscope or prognostication" (*S*, pp. 88–89). Later the *Waldeck Chronicle* records that "Dr. Faust" had correctly "prophesied that the city of Münster would surely be captured" from its Anabaptist occupiers on "that very night," that is, June 25, 1535 (*S*, p. 91). There is similar testimony to Faust's skill as a prognosticator from Philipp von Hutten, cousin of the famous humanist Ulrich, and the leader of an expedition to Venezuela. He wrote to his brother Moritz early in 1540 that he "must confess that the philosopher Faust hit the nail on the head" in prophesying "a very bad year" (*S*, p. 96). This would have been a distinct triumph, for a letter by the famous philologist Joachim Camerarius in 1536 records that Stibar, a Greek scholar, had been held "in suspense" by the "juggler's tricks" of "your friend Faust"; but Faust had been right to predict the bad turn of the Emperor's affairs, whereas Camerarius, both in his letters and his published works, had consistently predicted success.[10]

9 There is a minority tradition which argues that George Faust was a serious and learned scholar; see for example Henri Birven, *Der historische Doktor Faust: Maske und Antlitz* [*The Historical Doctor Faust: Mask and Face*] (Gelnhausen, 1963).

10 See Baron, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 60; the whole section on Faust and Joachim Camerarius is relevant (pp. 48–66).

Of course, by no means all of Faust's customers were satisfied. One account by a doctor, Philipp Begardi, published in 1539, speaks of Faust's "very petty and fraudulent" deeds. Begardi writes that "in taking or – to speak more accurately – in receiving money he was not slow," but "on his departure, as I have been informed, he left many to whistle for their money" (*S*, p. 95).

One can imagine for Faust a long life of petty chicanery, where occasional victories were hardly less ignominious than his humiliating defeats. He certainly gained notoriety for his quackery, sometimes combined with a degree of fear. Thus the city council of Ingolstadt resolved in 1528 that "a certain man who called himself Dr. George Faust of Heidelberg was told to spend his penny elsewhere and he pledged himself not to take vengeance on or make fools of the authorities for this order" (*S*, p. 90). Later, the city council of Nuremberg refused him admission: in 1532 it denied its "safe conduct to Doctor Faust, the great sodomite and necromancer" (*S*, p. 90). That Faust lived a restless and marginal life is supported by Tritheim, who wrote that at Kreuznach, Faust, having been appointed schoolmaster "through the influence of Franz von Sickingen," soon "began to indulge in the most dastardly kind of lewdness with the boys and when this was suddenly discovered, he avoided by flight the punishment that awaited him" (*S*, p. 86).[11]

The scholarly tradition has been so obsessed by the grotesque inadequacy of the historical George Faust as avatar of the protagonists of Marlowe and Goethe that it has paid little attention to how he was also – in his own petty way – a fascinating symbol of the major forces out of which the Faustian myth arose. A bragging and unsavory charlatan, no doubt; but also an unrepentant individualist who went his own way in a society where a regular job and a fixed abode were increasingly required. He united old and new traditions. The old is represented by his being called a conjuror; the verbal

11 Sickingen was an important figure, the leader of the Knights movement, and a strong supporter of Luther. He has been much written about, by Marx and Engels among others.

usages of a largely pre-scientific society habitually tolerated a now unthinkable latitude of meanings for conjuring, a latitude that extended from summoning devils out of hell to producing rabbits out of hats. But he was also an embodiment of the new forces making for change – the Renaissance humanists' revival of classical learning, for example, and their parallel pursuit of magical science – and he exhibited some of the Reformation's interest in biblical scholarship and the wider extension of academic learning.

THE MYTH BEGINS: FAUST, LUTHER, THE DEVIL, AND WITCHCRAFT

Deep in the Thuringian Forest there is a room where Satan's mockery once so infuriated Luther that he threw his inkwell at him. Time has not effaced, nor indeed did the German Democratic Republic neglect to refresh, that historic ink stain on the wall of the Wartburg Castle.

One reason the stain is historical, we may say, is that the Faust of myth sprang out of that ink: first, for the general reason that the damnation of George Faust was brought about posthumously through the printer's ink of innumerable chapbooks and pamphlets;[12] and second, because the impetus for that damnation came from Luther's obsessional sense of life as a perpetual duel with Satan. Luther used the devil to explain every misfortune, temptation, and doubt in his personal life. Though he never actually saw the devil, he was intensely aware of his continual presence; if his sleep was disturbed by someone rattling walnuts in a cupboard, it was the devil; and so was the voice that asked him, "Who has commanded you to preach the Gospel?"[13] These diabolic assaults, however, merely served to fortify Luther's faith, because, as he wrote, "To take

12 See especially Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, 1979), especially pp. 303–11.

13 Louis Coulange [pseudonym of Joseph Turmel], trans. Stephen Haden Guest, *The Life of the Devil* (New York, 1930), p. 149, quoting from Luther's *Tischreden* (Weimar, 1916), 4.606–7.

up the cross is voluntarily to take upon oneself and bear the hate of the Devil, of the world, of the flesh, of sin, of death."[14] Man's only safety from the devil was the stronghold of faith in God. This attitude is the theme of Luther's great hymn, "Ein' feste Burg" ["A mighty fortress is our God"]:

> The ancient Prince of Hell
> Hath risen with purpose fell;
> Strong mail of Craft and Power
> He weareth in this hour,
> On earth is not his fellow.[15]

Human society has rarely been without some systematization of a belief in an invisible world inhabited by spirits; but over most of history the beliefs have been highly pluralistic. The Faust myth arose when the development of Christian thought had polarized the human and the supernatural worlds into a conflict between good and evil, and had given their struggle a new intensity and rigor. This inevitably gave the devil and his hierarchy unprecedented theological and psychological importance.

It had not always been so. The devil plays a very minor role in the Old Testament. He is, of course, Eve's serpent-tempter in the Garden of Eden and therefore the cause of man's fall, but thereafter he rarely appears. In the New Testament, however, he figures more prominently, especially when, in a scene that foreshadows the devil's pact with Faust, he tempts Christ: "the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." The assumption that only diabolic magic will make it possible to obtain one's desires on earth is to be found again and again from this time on; and it is significant that Jesus does not contest Satan's power, but confines himself to the famous answer: "Get thee hence, Satan:

14 Cited in Marshall Fishwick, *Faust Revisited: Some Thoughts on Satan* (New York, 1963), p. 61.

15 Carlyle's translation.

for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."[16]

Later, St. Paul, particularly in the Epistle to the Ephesians, played an important part in confirming the dominion of Satan over the secular world. The best that the faithful Christian could hope for was that Christ's sacrifice had imposed an eventual limit on Satan's power to that over the dead in hell; and that on judgment day hell's gates would be opened, and the elect would spend eternity in God's own kingdom, leaving the rest to burn forever. The final steps in developing the orthodox Christian demonology were taken by the fathers of the church, and especially by St. Augustine. His treatise in vindication of Christianity, *De Civitate Dei* [*The City of God*], effectively places man under a dual monarchy and, as a result of the fall and man's inherently depraved nature, allows Satan to rule over the world and over the flesh, that is, over the City of the Devil. The final doctrinal step was taken in A.D. 547, when the Council of Constantinople proclaimed Satan to be eternal, and declared belief in him and his powers to be an essential part of the Christian faith.

Fortunately, the early Christian believer had a certain remedy against Satan always at hand. Christ had passed on to his disciples his power to cure "them which were vexed with unclean spirits";[17] and with this supernatural power of priesthood went the duty to extirpate heretical magic. Exorcism, confession, and absolution all gave the practicing Christian some assurance that Satan's power could be curbed.

But the fairly relaxed coexistence of a benevolent God and his malevolent double was brought to an end in many areas of Western civilization through a complex process which began in the late Middle Ages and reached its terrible climax after the Reformation. The main cause for a growing awareness of the devil's power seems to have been renewed attempts, in the thirteenth century and onwards, to extirpate heresy, especially that alleged against the Albi-

16 Matthew 4.8–9, 10.

17 Acts 5.16.

genses of southern France. At the forefront were the Dominicans, and their great leader Thomas Aquinas, who codified earlier ideas, especially those of Augustine, about the eternal warfare of God and devil. All works of magicians, he declared, were necessarily evil; men were constantly subject to the attacks of demons;[18] and "witchcraft is . . . to be considered permanent."[19] Pope Gregory IX started the Inquisition in 1229; and now that the doctrines had been established that all magical practices should be equated with a willing allegiance to the devil, and were therefore necessarily heretical, the stage had been set for the last act. In answer to the complaint of two Dominican Inquisitors, Heinrich Krämer and Jacob Sprenger, that witchcraft was rife in Germany and that the existing authorities there did little except impede their efforts, Pope Innocent VIII in 1484 issued a Bull, known as *Summis Desiderantes*, in which, being "supremely desirous" of eradicating heresy, he directed all ecclesiastical authorities to assist the witch-hunting activities of the Inquisitors. Two years later Krämer and Sprenger published a vast and detailed handbook, entitled *Malleus Maleficarum* [*The Hammer against the Witches*], which set out in detail the beliefs and practices of witches, and the ways in which they could best be recognized, caught, convicted, and burned. The book was enormously influential, and went through some fourteen editions by 1520.[20]

During the early years of the Reformation all sides were too preoccupied with their own internal battles to have much time for witch-hunting; but on the issue itself there was no division between Protestants and Catholics. Despite occasional exceptions – four

18 *Summa contra Gentiles*, 3.2.104–6; *Summa Theologica*, 3.cxiv; quoted from Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100–1700: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia, 1972), pp. 53–62, 63–71.

19 *Commentary on the Four Books of Sentences*, Distinctio XXXIV, quoted from Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe*, p. 74.

20 See Jeffrey B. Russell, *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans* (London, 1980), p. 79. Extracts of *Malleus Maleficarum* are available in Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe*, pp. 113–87.

witches were burned in Wittenberg in 1540[21] – the persecution in Germany did not attain its full intensity until the 1560s; from then on Lutherans, Calvinists, and Roman Catholics were equally active in hunting witches.

Luther himself was an intransigent foe of witchcraft: "I should have no compassion on these witches; I would burn all of them," he said.[22] In Faust's own lifetime, Luther seems to have been the first to connect Faust with the devil. Luther mentions Faust twice in his *Table Talk*. The first mention occurs early in 1530, "one evening at the table": "When . . . a sorcerer named Faust was mentioned, Doctor Martin said in a serious tone: 'The devil does not make use of the services of sorcerers against me. If he had been able to do me any harm he would have done it long since. To be sure he has often had me by the head but he had to let me go again.'"[23] The second reference was taken down in the course of a conversation, probably in 1537, about "magicians and the magic art and how Satan blinded men . . . Much was said about Faust, who called the devil his brother-in-law; and the remark was made: 'If I, Martin Luther, had done no more than extend my hand to him, he would have destroyed me.'"[24]

Chronologically, the first recorded suggestion that Faust was killed by the devil was probably that made by Johannes Gast, a Protestant clergyman of Basel, who was apparently a believer in Faust's magic. He wrote in the second volume of *Sermones Convivales* [*Convivial Remarks*], published in 1548, that "the wretch was destined to come to a deplorable end, for he was strangled by the devil

21 H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Other Essays* (New York, 1969), p. 137.

22 August 25, 1538; *Tischreden, 1531–1546*, 4 (Weimar, 1912), pp. 51–52. See also "Of the bodily and spiritual witchcraft," in *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, cited in Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe*, pp. 197–201.

23 *Tischreden, 1531–1546*, 1 (Weimar, 1914), p. 445, cited in *S*, p. 93.

24 *S*, p. 93; June–July, 1537, *Luther's Works*, *Table talk*, ed. and trans. Theodore Tappert in *Luther's Works*, ed. Herbert T. Lehman, vol. 54 (Philadelphia, 1967), p. 247.

and his body on its bier kept turning face downward even though it was five times turned on its back. God preserve us lest we become slaves of the devil [*satanae mancipia*]" (*S*, p. 98). Another early account is by Johannes Manlius, a pupil of Luther's associate and successor Melanchthon, and it is dated 1563. Manlius recalls Melanchthon saying that "this same John Faust" knew that he was to die that night, and the next day his host "found him lying near the bed with his face turned towards his back. Thus the devil had killed him" (*S*, pp. 101–2).

Melanchthon himself mentioned Faust in terms as abusive as those employed by Luther, calling him "a vile beast and a sink of many devils" (*S*, p. 103). However, in the published record of his commentaries on the Bible made between 1549 and 1560, Melanchthon was less unsympathetic than Luther to magic and astrology, and he apparently believed in the devil's "strange feats of magic," one of which concerns Faust: Melanchthon tells how "Faust, the magician, devoured at Vienna another magician who was discovered a few days later in a certain cave. The devil can perform many miracles; nevertheless the church has its own miracles" (*S*, pp. 99–100). He also draws a parallel between Faust and Simon Magus. "Simon Magus," writes Melanchthon, "tried to fly to heaven, but Peter prayed that he might fall." Faust, he continues, "also tried this at Venice. But he was sorely dashed to the ground" (*S*, pp. 99–100). Manlius provides a somewhat fuller account of the latter incident, saying that when, imitating Simon Magus, Faust "wished to provide a spectacle at Venice he said he would fly to heaven. So the devil raised him up and then cast him down so that he was dashed to the ground and almost killed."[25]

Melanchthon and Manlius, then, continued the Lutheran tradition, which took an attitude to Faust almost diametrically opposed to that of the humanists such as Tritheim. Both groups were hostile to Faust; however, whereas the humanists denied that Faust actually had the magical powers he claimed, the Lutherans thought he really

25 Johannes Manlius, *Locorum Communium Collectanea*, cited in *S*, p. 101.

had such powers, but attributed them to the devil. It was this Lutheran counter-movement that eventually transformed the historical George Faust into the legendary figure of myth, by inventing his pact with the devil and his terrible end.

POPULAR DEVELOPMENT OF THE FAUST MYTH BEFORE 1587

It was Luther, Melanchthon, and their contemporary Protestant followers who were responsible for connecting Faust with the devil, and for attributing his eventual death to Satan. But the idea of the dated contract for his death was not published before the time of the Frankfurt *Faustbuch* in 1587. Interest in Faust had not diminished in the years following Faust's death around 1540 – indeed the number of writings about him grew steadily – but the religious and social situation soon changed enormously. The historical George Faust was fortunate not to have been among the many thousands of people who were burned as witches in Germany. It might well have been different had he lived two generations later, but there is no suggestion that any drastic action against him was contemplated during his lifetime.

The *Zimmerische Chronicle*, in a passage dated "after 1539," noted that the "notorious sorcerer Faust . . . died in or not far from the town of Staufen in Breisgau" (*S*, pp. 113–15). The *Chronicle* gives another version of a story first told by Gast, about how Faust, annoyed that the monks in a Vosges monastery refused to put him up overnight, had sent "a spirit" that haunted the place and made it uninhabitable. This malefic poltergeist suggests a certain belief in Faust's powers, but it is also a common staple of folk tales. Such stories were also told in later memoirs: in 1568, for instance, Johannes Wier, an active enemy of witchcraft persecutions, repeated the story of Faust's death, but also recounted a comic episode in which Faust, wanting a certain chaplain to get him more wine, and being told that the chaplain had to go to town to get a shave, assured him that all he had to do was to rub his face with a magic

salve; it was arsenic and, of course, it burned off his skin and his flesh as well as his hair.[26]

A fuller account of Faust's life and death is contained in a manuscript, written between 1572 and 1587, and now in the library of the Saxon town of Wolfenbüttel. A much more significant work, it adds continuity to the canon told in the earlier stories; indeed it is close enough to the *Faustbuch* to be considered a possible source, or, if not, another reflection of a common original.[27] The Wolfenbüttel version of the story is very close to the *Faustbuch* in its general development, and many incidental details are similar. Most notably of all, it introduces both the twenty-four-year pact and Faust's terrible end.

The rapid growth of persecution of witches added to the interest in, and the animosity expressed towards, Faust during this period. Witch-hunting was spread by all Christian religions, but in Germany particularly by Lutherans, who had, after all, destroyed most of the intermediate fortifications against witches offered by medieval Christendom. Luther had reduced rituals to a minimum – to communion, holy water, and a few other vestiges; there were no longer guardian angels, patron saints, or the Virgin Mary to act as beneficent mediating spirits; relics, talismans, penances, masses for the dead no longer promised daily protection against fear and loss; and the Lutheran church no longer offered the ceremony of exorcism against evil spirits. Erasmus reproached Luther for having created a void between God and man; the individual was indeed left alone in a world whose demonic terrors had increased, and where recourse even to white magic was stringently forbidden.[28]

26 Johannes Wier, *De Praestigiis Daemonium* [*Of the Illusions of Devils*] (1568 edn), cited in *S*, p. 106.

27 H. G. Haile, introduction to his English translation of the *Faustbuch*: *The history of Doctor Johann Faustus* (Urbana, 1965), and Haile, "Reconstruction of the Faust Book: the disputation," PMLA 78 (1963), pp. 175–89.

28 See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 58–65, 558–92; and Friedrich Heer, trans. Jonathan Steinberg, *The Intellectual History of Europe* (Cleveland, 1966), p. 227.

Luther's work for education and his development of a vernacular literature had created a vast extension of the reading public in Germany.[29] It was for this enlarged but relatively uneducated group, which had a particular need for a defense against the tireless activities of the devil, that the *Faustbuch* was written. The book was published in Frankfurt, Germany's ancient capital and by the 1580s both a Lutheran city and center of the book trade.

Books about demonic possession already formed an established genre, and one much favored by Frankfurt printers. The subject was also particularly topical in 1587. For instance, in the principality of Trier, not very far away, the previous summer had been very late; this had had disastrous results for the crops; and so, to find scapegoats, "a hundred and eighteen women and two men, from whom the avowal had been extorted that the prolongation of the winter was the work of their incantations," had been burned to death.[30]

JOHANN SPIES'S *HISTORIA VON D. JOHANN FAUSTEN* – THE *FAUSTBUCH*

The main source of most later versions of the Faust myth, the so-called *Faustbuch*, appeared in 1587. As the custom then was, the crowded title page of the small and ill-printed *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* summarized the story. It may be translated: *The History of Doctor Johann Faustus the notorious magician and necromancer, how he sold himself to the Devil for an appointed time, what strange adventures he saw meanwhile, bringing some about and living through others, until at last he received his well-deserved wages. For the greater part collected and prepared for the printer out of his own posthumous writings as a horrible precedent, abominable example and sincere warning to all conceited, inquisitive and godless persons.* James 4.7–8. Submit yourselves therefore

29 See, for example, Johannes Janssen, trans. A. M. Christie, *History of the German People after the Close of the Middle Ages*, (London, 1906), 1.1–60.

30 George Lincoln Burr, "The fate of Dietrich Flade," in *George Lincoln Burr*, ed. Roland H. Bainton and L. O. Gibbons (New York, 1943), p. 207, n. 44; my translation from the Latin. Two accounts of this particular persecution are also available in Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe*, pp. 216–33.